

**Remarks at the National Action Network Martin Luther King, Jr., Day Breakfast**  
*January 16, 2023*

Rev—make sure this is on. Is this on? Hello, hello, hello. Hello—no ho, okay. *[Laughter]* Rev, thank you for very much for that introduction. And quite frankly, thank you for your partnership. You've been a good friend for a long time. It's an honor to spend the King holiday with the National Action Network and with the King family—Martin and the family.

And I understand, you know, there's—Martin III, we celebrate the legacy of your beloved mother and father. They worked for the "Beloved Community." But congratulations today to the honorees, including your wife, who I understand has a birthday today. *[Laughter]*

Well, look, my wife has a rule in our family. When it's somebody's birthday, you sing "Happy Birthday."

Are you ready?

*[At this point, the President led members of the audience in singing "Happy Birthday".]*

Well, it's hell turning 30, but you've got to put up with it. *[Laughter]*

And Nancy Pelosi, who I think is literally, not figuratively, the greatest leader—House Speaker in American history. And Minyon Moore, a mover and a shaker in politics. And Ray Curry, a true champion for the dignity of workers. And everyone here, from the civil rights community and Congress, it's wonderful to be with you on this special day.

Yesterday morning on what would've been Dr. King's 94th birthday, I attended the Sunday services at Ebenezer. And I—it was deeply meaningful and moving for me. It was because we face another inflection point in our Nation's history, one that's going to determine what this country looks like several decades from now.

You know, this is a time for choosing. Will we choose democracy over autocracy or community over chaos? Love over hate?

These are the questions of our time that I ran for President to try to help answer and that Dr. King's life and legacy, in my view, show us the way forward. We just have to look back. We've got to be prepared.

With all of you here, together we've made some important progress. Two years ago, our economy was on its back—flat on its back. People were hurting, particularly in minority communities. Black Americans and other people of color were disproportionately hit.

And Kamala and I, and our administration, acted decisively, with the help of people in this room, to not only rescue the economy from the pandemic downturn, but to lay the foundation for a stronger and more resilient and more equitable economy for decades to come.

If you'll hold just a second, one of the things that I wanted to—it's a slight digression. But one of the big issues was with the pandemic. I wanted to make sure that we spent the time, effort, and had the mechanism to make sure that minority communities were not left behind, that they were not left in the lurch.

And the highest percentage of workers in minority communities were treated as—I mean, it was a single effort we had. And I'm very proud of the folks who ran that show that we got it done. We got it done.

You know, I'm of the view and have been my whole career—which is only a couple of years, I know; I don't look that, but—[laughter]—but I'm tired of trickle-down economics. You and I have never liked it, have we?

And I think the economy—the way it should grow in America is from the bottom up and the middle out. That way, poor folks have a shot, middle class people do well, and the wealthy still do very well. They still do very well, but they start to pay their fair share.

And 2 years in, it's clearer than ever that I think our economic plan is working. We've created nearly 11 million jobs, the strongest job growth on record for any President at this point in history. The unemployment rate is the lowest it's been in 50 years. And Black unemployment is near record lows. Wages for Black workers are up. The two strongest years ever for small-business creation, including Black small businesses.

Across the board, American families have a bit more breathing room. More Black Americans have health insurance than ever in American history.

And as of the first of—this first of January, our legislation is kicking in from last year. Insulin now is capped at \$35 a month for seniors on Medicare—instead of paying—instead of paying up to hundreds of dollars a month.

And Big Pharma—Big Pharma—under the law we finally got passed with not much help from the other team, Big Pharma is in a situation where if they rise—if they raise the drug price beyond the rate of inflation, they're going to pay stiff penalties for doing so. That's a fact.

And so we're trying to bring things under control. We're seeing the same progress on energy—on energy costs. Folks can get tax credits when they install energy-efficient appliances in their home, like an energy-efficient dishwasher or heat pumps, or electric vehicles, if you're able to buy one of those.

We're investing in those fence-line communities that have suffered most consequences and have been smothered by pollution, like "Cancer Alley" in Louisiana or, in my home State, Route 9 in Delaware where the—where all the mills are—where the oil refineries are.

And we're making sure that these communities benefit from the biggest investment ever, ever, ever, with cleaner and safer environment. And the jobs that are going to go to clean up the environment are going to go to the folks in that community—good-paying jobs. They're the ones that are going to get the jobs.

And so, folks, these are all pieces of a big, new law that we passed, and now they're kicking in. Americans can start to feel the benefits of these laws in their everyday lives. But that's not all.

We're implementing a once-in-a-generation infrastructure law with equity at its center—I mean that sincerely—with equity at its center. My Justice40 Initiative means 40 percent of all of the benefits in this infrastructure law, which over a trillion two hundred billion dollars over the next 10 years, those benefits of certain Federal investments flow directly to disadvantaged and underserved communities.

For example, 70 percent of the new infrastructure investments for shifting to electric schoolbuses, for example, so far have gone to disadvantaged communities where kids aren't breathing that polluted air from diesel buses. Seventy percent so far has gone to minority communities. And a lot more is coming.

We're modernizing American roads, bridges, ports, airports across the country. And we're beginning to replace every poisonous lead pipe in America. Every single one. We've already started, so every child in America—so every American can turn on a faucet at home or at school and drink clean water.

A significant number of minority communities can't access affordable high-speed internet, as you all know and you've told me for years. But we're going to make sure that every community has access to affordable high-speed internet so no parent has to drive to a McDonald's parking lot to have their kid sign in for a connection to be able to do their homework.

And by the way, it's going to create millions of jobs in the meantime.

Folks, look, speaking of education, instead of photo ops—and I know I spend a lot of time—some here from Delaware know I'm a big Delaware State guy. I went to the University of Delaware, but my political foundation is Delaware State College, HBCU.

I said I was going to help HBCUs that haven't been getting the help they need. You know, the folks at HBCUs are as competent as anybody else. But guess what? They don't have the laboratories. They don't have the funding because they don't have the endowments to build the laboratories for these good, new paying jobs. And so I've already—we've delivered nearly \$6 billion in funding to HBCUs to invest in the next generation of Black leaders. That's a record, and that's a fact, and it's not going to stop.

To help—look, to help close the wealth gap, the racial wealth gap, under Secretary Fudge—she is leading the effort—we're expanding efforts to build Black generational wealth, like every other person who has built their wealth. How did they build it? Homes. They invest in the equity in their homes. That's how it got built.

You know, if you build a—in the last 25 years, if you build a housing development on one side of an interstate highway and you built the same one on the opposite side, and one is predominantly Black and the other is predominantly White—guess what?—the value of the exact same home, built by the exact same builder is more valuable on the White side of that highway than on the Black side. That's a fact.

So we're going to aggressively—aggressively—combat racial discrimination in housing, including working to restore the rule that says, if a community gets Federal housing aid, it's not enough to just say it won't discriminate. It has to be meaningful, affirmative steps to overcome patterns of segregation and give everybody a fair shot that lives there. The same thing.

And by the way, if you live in one of those neighborhoods and you have the same exact car I have in the other neighborhood, you pay more for your insurance on that side. No basis for it, none at all, other than you're Black and I'm White.

We're also working with leaders to strengthen programs to redress the negative impacts of redlining. One of the things that I was—as a young county councilman, that's what almost lost me an election, but I'm very proud of it—trying to take care of redlining and get rid of discrimination.

We're launching a \$1 billion pilot project funded by my bipartisan infrastructure law that Nancy made sure we got passed—Nancy, thank you—to help reconnect communities where highways have physically broken them up and locked out predominantly Black communities from opportunities, economic growth.

In the city of Wilmington, Delaware, where I'm from—well, guess what?—I-95 goes up through what used to be a predominantly Black neighborhood. Well, now you've got seven, eight, nine lanes counting exits and on-ramps and off-ramps that divide the community. It's lost its coherence.

Well, there's remediation money in the infrastructure bill to be able to pave over that, to have—so that if it's a tunnel, and instead you put park land in there, put recreation facilities in there, community centers in there.

And finally, we're addressing the cruel fact that Black families' homes often appraise, as I said, at a much lower value than the homes owned—the same home owned by White families.

Black small businesses are the engines and the economic glue of any community, I need not tell anybody in this room. Restaurants, law firms, barbershops, beauty shops—these are the folks that hold the community together. They're the ones that sponsor the Little League. They're the ones that sponsor the church events. They're the ones that sponsor the local volunteer fire company. They're the ones that sponsor everything. They keep a community going.

Well, to hold that community together, we need to encourage more of that. So I'm proud I signed into law that permanently authorizes the Minority Small Business Development Agency for the first time in our history. And it gives it—[*applause*]. It gives expanded authority to help even more Black-owned businesses grow.

My administration also oversees hundreds of billions of dollars in Federal contracts, from everything from refurbishing a deck of an aircraft carrier to installing rails and handrails in a Federal building.

Well, I determined a long time ago, when I first got in, that—you know, there's a law that was passed in the late thirties—1930s—that says that if you, in fact, are going to spend taxpayers' dollars, and the President has to authorize where that's spent, it should be spent by American—on American-made products by American businesses.

Well, guess what? We're doing it. And an awful lot of people are going to work. An awful lot of people are going to work—and, folks, in that—in that—when I assigned those—when we awarded those contracts, I made a commitment, increasing from what is now roughly 10 percent of those contracts going into minority businesses to 15 percent—to 15 percent by 2025.

And the share of those dollars are going to go to small businesses and disadvantaged businesses, including Black- and Brown-owned businesses. That's going to mean an additional \$100 billion going into the creation of these small businesses—\$100 billion.

And we're doing all this while being fiscally responsible. We're making sure the wealthiest and biggest corporations finally start paying their fair share. Far from it, so far.

You know, if you'll hold a second, we're here—we're talking about—and you've heard me say it, and I apologize for repeating it: There are over 55 companies in the Fortune 500—500 companies that made \$40 billion in 2022—or 2021. Do you know how much they paid in taxes? Zero. Not one single penny.

But if you're a local cop, you're a local firefighter, you're a local nurse, you're going to pay 24 to 26 percent. And they're paying zero.

Well, we increased the corporate minimum tax—I want to go back at it—increased the minimum tax to 15 percent. Now, that's not a whole lot for many of these major corporations. But no one earning—by the way, no one earning less than \$400,000 a year pays a single penny more in taxes. But 15 percent seems to me to be a bare minimum when corporates make—a corporation making tens of billions of dollars should be paying.

Now, we're making this progress. At the same time, reduce the deficit. You know the talk—they're going to talk about "big-spendin' Democrats" again? [*Laughter*] Guess what? I reduced the deficit, last year, \$350 billion. And this year, the Federal deficit is down one trillion-plus dollars. Hear me. That's a fact. And there's going to be hundreds of billions reduced over the next decade.

But so what? These guys are the fiscally—[*laughter*]—they're fiscally demented, I think. They don't—[*laughter*]—they don't quite get it.

To deliver equal justice under the law, we're building a Federal bench with judges that reflect all of America. Your dad talked about giving—basically, "Give me judges, and we'll straighten things out." Fair judges.

Well, guess what? You've probably heard of a lady called Ketanji Brown Jackson. I made a commitment to you, Al. I said, "I'm going to appoint the first Black woman to the Supreme Court." And she's about the smartest one of all of them, I might add. *[Laughter]*

And, by the way, we have appointed more Black women to the Federal Circuit Courts than every other President in American history combined. Every single President combined. And by the way, if you see Dick Durbin—Senator Durbin, from Illinois—thank him. Thank him, because he got them through.

And there's so many of you who worked so hard to pass the George Floyd [Justice; White House correction] in Policing Act. But since the Senate Republicans blocked it last year, I did what—the only thing I could do. I signed a historic Executive order that included key elements of that bill for the Federal—at the Federal level.

It bans chokeholds and greatly restricts no-knock warrants. It creates a national database for officer misconduct that must be placed in the national database; to tighten the use of force policies to emphasize deescalation. We have to retrain cops as to why shouldn't you always shoot with deadly force. The fact is, if you need to use your weapon, you don't have to do that.

And look, to call a fresh approach to recruit—in how we recruit, how we hire, how we train, how we promote, and how we retain—retain—law enforcement that come from the neighborhoods that they serve and know the people they're charged to protect.

Now, I know a lot of people say community police is not a good idea. Come to Wilmington, Delaware, with me with the old neighborhood I used to work in on the East Side called "the Bucket." They need protection. They're asking for protection, an overwhelmingly Black community. But they want cops who are fair. They want cops who know their communities. They want cops who are going to be doing it by the numbers.

And, folks, that's tied to more community policing and advancing public trust and safety.

Now, that's also why about a month after Buffalo and Uvalde—and I visited both—I signed the first major gun safety legislation in nearly 30 years. And I'll say what I said then, and I'll say it over and over again: I am going to get assault weapons banned. I did it once, and I'm going to do it again.

There's no social redeeming value. Deer aren't wearing Kevlar vests out there. What the hell do you need an assault—no, I'm serious. And ban the number of bullets that go in a magazine. There's no need for any of that.

I love my right-wing friends who talk about "the tree of liberty is watered with the blood of patriots." Give me a—if you need to worry about taking on the Federal Government, you need some F-15s. You don't need an AR-15. I'm serious. Think about it. Think about the rationale for this. It's about money—money, money, money.

Meanwhile, we're making historic investments in community violence interventions. Studies have shown they reduce violent crime up to 60 percent. We've seen this kind of impact in Baltimore and Sacramento.

And by the way, even if I didn't want to do this, I'd be in real trouble. My daughter is a social worker, and this is what she does. And so, if I didn't, I'd be in real trouble with my Ashley. You've got an Ashley; we've got an Ashley. You think I'm joking. I'm not joking.

And one other thing about equal justice—I'm keeping my promise. No one—I'll say it again: No one should be in Federal prison for the mere possession of marijuana. No one. In addition to that, they should be released from prison and completely pardoned and their entire record expunged—expungent—expunged—[*laughter*—so that if they have to ask, "Have you ever been . . ." you can honestly say, "No."

Folks, I just signed legislation to empower the FCC to cap the cost of phone calls from prison. Prison. Prisoners [prisons; White House correction] charge incarcerated people. It's a step just to allow them for some dignity. A lot of Federal prisoners are put in prisons, and they shouldn't be, far from where they live. They should be able to communicate with their families, with their children.

And we brought the Brittney—and we brought Brittney Griner home just in time for Christmas. And we have more to bring home as well.

Last year, I also held a first-of-its-kind White House summit against hate-fueled violence that many of you called for and supported. And, Rev, thank you for that as well.

Together, we're saying out loud, and we're saying it clearly that, in America, hate will not prevail. As my dad used to say, but it is not original to him, he'd say, "Joey, silence is complicity." Silence is complicity. We cannot remain silent, even if all we're doing is pointing it out and putting pressure on it to change. Silence is complicity.

For example, with your help, I signed a law, a hundred years in the making, to finally making lynching a Federal hate crime—to silence, as your dad said, "the crying voice of little Emmett Till, screaming from the rushes of the Mississippi."

Folks, it takes too long. And you've just shown me at the bill signing for other victories—to enshrine marriage equality into the law; to make Juneteenth the first new Federal holiday since the establishment of Dr. King's holiday.

The idea—if we can hold a second here—the idea that we're supposed to remain silent on the abuses of the past, as if they didn't occur, that's not being "woke," that's being honest. That's talking about history.

Well, folks, but we have a lot of unfinished work to do though. A lot of unfinished work. We have to keep building on it and defend our progress, because this new Congress—this new Congress——

[*The President sighed.*]

[*Laughter*] Look, I know I get criticized from some of you and some folks in our party, my party, but I'm ready to work with a new Republican House on any Republican—or any Republican Congress to make progress for the people of America.

But like many Americans, I was disappointed to see the very first bill that the House of—House Republicans—and, Nancy, you probably were rolling over when you saw it—are bringing to the floor that would help the wealthy people and big corporations cheat on their taxes at the expense of ordinary, middle class taxpayers.

You know, all these new IRS agents we have is because they fired a lot of them, and a lot are retiring. And guess what? Who needs serious agents to know what they're doing or not doing—the billionaires, the multi-multimillionaires?

And according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, this one bill alone will add \$114 billion to the deficit. This is their first bill. And they campaigned on inflation? They didn't say, if elected, their plan was to make inflation worse.

Plus, House Republicans introduced another bill on the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, blocking action that would help lower gasoline prices and help consumers.

They're preparing to vote on a third bill. They want a national sales tax. Let me say this again—I know if I said that, it sounds like, "What's Biden making up here?" They want to raise taxes on the middle class by taxing thousands of everyday items from groceries, gasoline, clothing, cutting taxes for the wealthiest, because they want to supplant the money lost from taxes on the millionaires and billionaires with a sales tax on virtually everything in the country. What in God's name is that all about, other than what is obvious?

They want working class folks to be paying another 10, 20 percent on their taxes, depending on where they live and how they're spending the money. And they're going to—and reduce taxes for the superwealthy.

Now, if we didn't see it, I'd think they're making this stuff up. If I told you in 2023 that the party was going to run on a national sales tax—well, that's how they're starting their new term, cutting taxes for billionaires.

And by the way, the number billionaires went up during the recession. Up. They didn't go down; they went up. Raising taxes on working families, making inflation work—worse.

Let me be clear: If any of these bills happen to reach my desk, I will veto them. Any of them.

What I was saying during this last election cycle, this off-year election, this next thing—everybody said, "They've got to be making this up, Biden." Well, they're going to try to continue to try to cut Social Security or Medicare, which Americans have been paying into it with every single paycheck they've earned since they first—got their first job when they were 16 years old.

But if Republicans want to work together on real solutions—that's what they—they want to—they're going to argue that the thing is that for them to be sustained, you're going to have to change the way in which it works. Instead of putting more money in to guarantee Social Security, they're going to, kind of, cut Social Security, cut Medicare.

Look, if they want to work together on real solutions to lower inflation, create jobs, and build an economy that works for everybody, I'm ready.

One more thing: I don't want to hear a word from the other side about my student debt relief plan. Let me tell you why I say that.

It's going to help tens of millions of folks. Folks on Pell grants were hit financially because of the pandemic. Seventy percent of Black college students receive Pell grants. For many Black students, the saving will be significant in my debt relief plan, including wiping out their student debt completely. That's a real game-changer. And by the way, it will increase economic growth, not diminish it.

But the other side is dead set against it. These are the same folks who didn't have any problem at all—any problem at all—during the pandemic, to vote for and make sure they get the so-called pandemic relief loans. We all supported it.

But guess what? A lot of these folks in the Congress, on the Republican side, were beneficiaries of these debt relief loans to the tunes of tens of millions of dollars. Not individually. I think the highest individual one was a million two hundred or something. I didn't hear a word. I did not hear a word from them about, "They shouldn't be getting that relief."

We didn't limit how much. We said, "If you had a loss and it was legitimate to business, then you get to wipe it away." And they're complaining about some kid being able to take away \$20,000 in student debt that keeps him and his wife, or his husband or her husband, from being able to buy a home or start a business or just get going?

Well, these same folks who are going after us, they're the ones who voted for the tax benefits of the wealthiest and biggest corporations that weren't paid for. The Trump tax cut was well over, almost \$2 trillion. Not a penny of it was paid for. So give me a break. Give me a break.

Currently, the only thing blocking my plan is them suing us. My administration is making the case to the Supreme Court, and I'm confident—I'm confident—in the legal authority to carry out our plan.

You know me. I said, "If you had my back," and I said, "I'd have yours." On this one and so much more, I have your back. But we've got to stand together. We've got to stand together, including protecting a woman's right to choose.

We have to continue to fight for racial justice.

We've got to cut Black child poverty. We cut it in half in 2021 because of the child tax credit. We should be—permanently cut it. Now, I need your help to make it permanent.

And I was pleased to see Democrats and Republicans work together to pass the Electoral Count Reform Act to protect the will of the people—Nancy, thank you for getting that done—and a peaceful transfer of power. But we have to get the votes in Congress for the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act.

That's why I went to Atlanta a year ago, to make clear I—we cannot let the filibuster be an obstacle in protecting the sacred right to vote—period—if we get there.

Let me close with this. Many of you have been working on these issues for a long time. Over the past 2 years, we've gotten an awful lot done together. We've got a lot done together. So let's keep it going. We've got the most vibrant economy in the world right now—in the world. We're doing better than any other major nation in the world today.

And that's what I thought about yesterday at Ebenezer, in that inflection point in history we're at. The path is clear: To go forward, we need to go together. So let's be guided by Dr. King's light and by the charge of Scripture, which is: "Let us never grow weary in doing what is right, for if we do not give up, we will reap our harvest in due time."

Well, we're going to reap the harvest. Let's remember who we are: We're the United States of America. And there's nothing beyond our capacity—nothing, nothing, nothing—if we do it together.

So God bless you all. God bless the King family. And, ladies and gentlemen, may God protect our troops.

Thank you so very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:16 p.m. at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Alfred C. Sharpton, Jr., founder and president, and his daughter Ashley, NAN Youth Huddle founder and director, National Action Network (NAN); Rep. Nancy Pelosi; Arndrea Waters King, wife of Martin Luther King III; Minyon Moore, leader of State and local affairs and multicultural strategies, Dewey Square Group; Ray Curry, president, United Automobile Workers; and Brittney Y. Griner, center, Women's National Basketball Association's Phoenix Mercury, who was released from Russian custody on December 8, 2022.

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